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Jill Pable

California State University Sacramento

Katherine S. Ankerson

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ankerson@ksu.edu

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Pable, Jill and Ankerson, Katherine S., "Knowing Today What We'll Miss Tomorrow: When teaching and practice go hand-in-hand" (2004). *Interior Design Program: Faculty Scholarly and Creative Activity*. 3. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/arch_id_facultyschol/3

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Knowing Today What We'll Miss Tomorrow:

When teaching and practice go hand-in-hand

Jill Pable, PH.D., IDEC, and Kathrine S. Ankerson, IDEC

You've enjoyed participating in juries for the interior design program at a local school. After all, you remember your own experiences, the late nights, the relentless professors, the exhaustion, and – oh yes – the thrill of an encouraging word about your ideas and how you represented them. Your design education was a forming experience. When you think about it . . . often you find yourself pondering over a problem and wondering: "How would my professor have approached this?" Or, if you have that tingling in your gut when you know that a design decision you made on that last project didn't conform to your aspirations for the project, you might ask yourself, "What would my Methods professor say about that decision?"

Yes, you remember the good educators you've encountered and, in fact, 10, 20, even 30 years later, you still refer to them in your mind's eye for advice and guidance.

It was one day last spring when I realized that I still carried Dr. Gorski around with me in my mind. The occasion was not auspicious; in fact, I was in a training session and couldn't stifle a yawn! Yawns were not allowed in Dr. Gorski's class. Definitely not a yawn without a hand or notebook covering the open mouth! It is also Professor Gorski's voice I hear (with his accented speech patterns coloring the description) as I look at a building and consider its historical significance and the events that have become a part of its past and current history.

Other instructors from my past have shaped my thoughts and decisions as well. I never let Professor Smith see anything but my best. She had such high expectations for me. I could tell she thought I had real talent. She wouldn't let me get by without pushing myself, pushing the limits of my talent. I may never have realized the talent within me with-

out her expectations. And when I am tempted to leave a decision, even though it is an average decision, maybe not an excellent decision, it is Professor Smith's face and voice that play in my mind, pushing me not to settle for average. Pushing for the excellence she knows is there. And I know is there.

Oh, and "consistency." That was the message from Professor Matthews. A consistency that permeated decision-making on projects. A consistency that guides many decisions today in all parts of my life.

What an influence my education has had on me! I don't mean just the subjects. Certainly that was why I went to school. To learn about architecture. To learn to design. To make an impact on the world we live in. I received an excellent education. I left school prepared to enter the professional world, and build upon my abilities with each experience in each firm. A group of lifelong friends bolstered my progress, a built-in support from those who know why we put in the late nights, know the pressure of a deadline, and the exhilaration of meeting it in a most excellent manner.

All that aside, it is not the subject that swims in my mind, or the physicality of the building (although I do remember climbing in an open restroom window one night when I needed to get into the building to finish a project for the next day . . .), it is Professor Andrews, as he encouraged me to explore ideas. Not only design ideas, but ideas about the world. To push myself to wonder . . . just to wonder. What an exhilarating thing wondering is! And when he couldn't answer my questions, could no longer guide my wondering, he researched on his own and then pushed me some more!

What an impact the educators in my life have had! No, I don't remember much about the average ones. I don't remember much about the educators who were just doing their job, or those who read to us in class out of the textbook. But I do remember those who encouraged, prodded and expected volumes. I do remember the visiting professors, there for one term or a year. Those coming from "real life" practice. I remember asking, "Do you really do this once you're out of school?" more than once!

And now, the department chair of the local design school is asking me if I would consider being an adjunct professor for a class next semester. I think about those people whose advice I sought and from whom I benefited, and the impact I might have on a group of students in the oh-so-formative years of their professional careers. My past instructors say: "Yes, go for it! Think of the impact you can have. You, too, may influence someone's decision years from now!" And aloud, I say "Sure, I would love to give it a try. I think I have a lot to offer to the students."

That was last month. In the meantime, a new project at work has been all-encompassing. The deadline is coming up. I woke last night from a dream with the calendar day sheets flying from the desktop planner and realize that class begins next week! Next week? Monday. Four days from now. Uh-oh. Better be ready.

Where to begin . . . this seemed so easy when I agreed. But now they are asking for a syllabus. How in the world does one write a syllabus? What should be included?

You are not the first person that has asked this question, and the leap from practice to teaching can be, in fact, a flying leap. However, there are sources that can help you, the practitioner, assemble a cohesive and effective college learning experience. It is often past educational experiences that provide the largest influence on performance as educators in the classroom, whether teaching in an adjunct position or as your profession. Where are the available sources, you ask? How may you take advantage of them to assure a quality experience both for yourself and the students you are entrusted with?

Believe it or not, you have more tools in your arsenal than you might think:

- Real-life projects you are currently involved with make great case studies from which to discuss do's and don'ts.
- Your up-to-date knowledge of products and people make design "real" for students.
- Your knowledge about presentations and client-professional procedures bring relevance to your students' understanding.

Many universities and colleges maintain a teaching and learning center of some sort. Sometimes this resource is an entire building with assistance available from qualified staff or it may be a collection of publications assembled in one common location in the library. Or the resource may exist in a network of educators at the school who have made a commitment to assist those wishing to improve their teaching.

The Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC) has also recognized the need to sift through the vast wealth of information regarding teaching and learning, assembling pertinent information in a just-in-time format for design educators of all types and backgrounds. The result is "Teaching Triage: Design Instruction Solutions Now," a new subscription on-line information source arranged in a need-it-now instant reference format. You can access it at www.idec.org, then choose "CEU Courses." The "Teaching Triage" is also an IDECEC-approved continuing education experience

completed with an on-line quiz. Regardless of how you use "Teaching Triage," its practical yet inclusive approach to teaching addresses numerous topics you will likely encounter as a first-time or seasoned teacher:

- How to construct a syllabus that communicates and protects both you and your students.
- Learning theories that affect how your students absorb new information.
- A probing bio that reveals where today's students are philosophically coming from.
- Definitions for teaching terms that you aren't born knowing the answer to.
- How to write a test and guard against cheating.
- Using course evaluations to advantage and assess your own teaching progress.

IDEC is no newcomer to high-value, practical continuing education and has long offered learning experiences in connection with its regional and international conferences. Similarly offered from the IDEC Web site is "How to Dodge the Tomatoes," an IDECEC-approved course by Stephanie Clemons, Ph.D. tailored specifically to the needs of continuing education instructors and CEU learners (and jointly sponsored by ASID).

The grand opening of continuing education experiences such as "Teaching Triage" and "How to Dodge the Tomatoes" courtesy of IDEC is no accident, and plans are currently on the boards for the development of more in-person and on-line learning opportunities through the canopy of the "IDEC Academy." This initiative is presently under the review of the IDEC membership and, if approved, will usher in the power of IDEC's research and instruction into the continuing education realm.

Through the IDEC Academy initiative, the council recognizes it is uniquely positioned to offer high-quality experiences stemming from the wealth of research, teaching and practice information that its members routinely produce and disseminate. It seems natural that this knowledge should find its way to practitioners, educators and the public alike via instructors who are thoughtful, knowledgeable thinkers and superior idea communicators by virtue of their teaching experience.

The IDEC Academy points to a fortunate collusion of teaching and practice that may hold significant promise for the ongoing evolution of our profession. That is, this closer working relationship between theory and application may potentially help translate interior design discovery

and knowledge into informed physical space in a more timely fashion, to the ultimate benefit of the profession and the public alike.



Jill Pable, Ph.D., IDEC, is an assistant professor of interior design in the Department of Design at the California State University Sacramento and serves as national secretary/treasurer of IDEC.

Katherine S. Ankerson, IDEC, is an associate professor of interior design in the College of Architecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and a past director-at-large of IDEC. The council can be contacted at (317) 328-4437, fax: (317) 280-8527 or via www.idec.org. Send inquiries to info@idec.org.